

THE TRAVEL

THEY are the most unlikely of allies. One is a traveller, a mother of four with straggly bleached blonde hair, who had a very basic education and grew up in a caravan. The other is an earnest Cambridge University graduate who was born with the proverbial silver spoon in her mouth.

What the two have in common is the controversial Dale Farm travellers' camp near Basildon in Essex.

The traveller is Kathleen McCarthy, a 48-year-old resident of Dale Farm who faces eviction from the site. Standing beside her, as she holds forth on human rights, is Natalie Szarek, the American-born Cambridge graduate who is campaigning on behalf of Dale Farm residents and whose story could not be more different from theirs.

Today, for reasons best known to herself, she calls herself Natalie Fox. She has lived at the site for the past month as head of the Dale Farm Solidarity group. She helped set up Camp Constant to defend the travellers against the firm of bailiffs, Constant & Co, which has a multi-million-pound contract to clear Dale Farm.

Szarek helps the travellers to practise building barricades and resistance strategies, and runs perimeter patrols and eviction workshops — while also managing the media.

She also happens to be the daughter of eminent academics.

Szarek, 24, grew up in a large detached house in a wealthy area of Cleveland, Ohio. She went to an exclusive private school in the city and her parents are professors at the private Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland.

But then, Natalie is just one of an extraordinary collection of wealthy and entitled activists who have temporarily ditched their comfortable existence and flocked to Dale Farm



by Zoe
Brennan

to support the travellers. It emerged this week that another of the self-styled leaders of the Dale Farm protesters is a Cambridge University-educated blow-in as well.

His name is Jacob Wills, who like many other activists has also bafflingly changed his name — in his case to Jake Fulton.

His parents, too, are eminent professors at leading universities.

Wills, 22, grew up in a £1 million house in fashionable Tufnell Park, North London, and attended the sought-after Catholic London Oratory School, where Tony Blair sent his children.

He went on to King's College,

Cambridge graduates. The sons and daughters of professors. Grammar school boys. How a clique of very privileged young Left-wing activists is advising the law-defying travellers of Dale Farm

Cambridge. There, he studied English literature and was the Socialist Worker representative.

His mother Clair Wills, 48, is a professor of Irish literature at Queen Mary, part of the University of London, and his stepfather Peter Dews, 59, is a professor of philosophy at the University of Essex.

His father is Ken Hirschkop, an American professor and a leading expert in Marxist literary theory.

A school photograph shows him with short hair, diligently playing the violin. Today, he looks rather different,

his hair close-shaved around the sides, the rest hanging in long rat-tails down his back, activist style.

He resembles the eco-warrior Swampy — but sounds rather different. Indeed, one pundit has posted next to a YouTube clip of Wills promoting the travellers' case: 'Has Swampy been taking elocution lessons? He has gone all posh.'

Szarek and Wills have been arrested several times for taking part in direct action protests in recent years.

Szarek was one of the leaders of the pro-Gaza occupation of Cambridge

University's law faculty in 2009, and was arrested during a climate change protest in Nottingham.

She has a long history of activism. One contemporary at Cambridge University recalls: 'She was Women's Officer at Cambridge, and she was absolutely loathed. She was a real kill-joy and would come down like a ton of bricks on any fun.'

'She didn't like anything that smacked of sexism, even if it was light-hearted. She was terribly humourless, and not well loved. She would often get a bee in her bonnet

LEERS' TOFFS



Eminent parents: Natalie Szarek



A well-spoken Swampy: Jacob Wills



for the worst. Barricades and a massive concrete-filled car called "the beast" were in place ready to deter any potential onslaught.

Things were tense but it was a good kind of tension, spirits were high and the scaffolding was filled with activists and gypsies singing, chanting slogans and ready to resist.

May-Bowles is also said to be involved with UK Uncut — a protest group which has targeted Barclays, Topshop and Vodafone for alleged tax avoidance with a series of sit-ins.

Like all the activists, he eulogises the traveller lifestyle. He ends his blog with a call to arms: 'The main point I'm trying to make is this — come to Dale Farm. You'll be doing something amazing and you'll have an amazing time doing it.'

'It's about half-an-hour out of London on the train — Liverpool Street to Wickford. Call [he gives mobile telephone numbers] once you're on your way to arrange a lift.'

'Piece of p***. If you could bring some spare cups or cutlery, that would be nice.'

Indeed, Dale Farm Solidarity has put out an appeal on its website for a shopping list of items, including energy bars and extra blankets.

There is even a Dale Farm Solidarity welcome pack available online, giving directions and instructions, 'key messages' and a quick political primer.

It says: 'It's crucial we act with real sensitivity and take our lead from the residents here. If the worst happens, we can go back to our comfortable homes.' It also gives 'bust card info' — instructions on what to do if arrested.

There are now around 100 protesters at the camp — the majority of them well-educated and middle-class. One commentator who has infiltrated the camp describes them as a '100-strong



Pictures: MARK BULLMORE/REX / BBC / LUCY YOUNG

nting eviction: Two young travellers demonstrating at the Dale Farm site

it something that didn't bother
body else.'

Szarek and Wills are not the only
Dale Farm activists with a gilded
ground. There is also one Yoshka
Szekr, who was 'outed' as an aca-
demic whose real name is Dr Jonathan
Oppenheim, one of the world's
leading physicists who works along-
side Professor Stephen Hawking.

When confronted by journalists, the
then-headed Dr Oppenheim, 37, a
Royal Society Research Fellow and
expert in quantum information
theory and quantum gravity, admitted
his real identity and claimed the
travellers were victims of a 'socially
unacceptable form of racism'.

What do these well-to-do types do
at Dale Farm? YouTube clips of life at
Camp Constant show them slow-
ly peeling tomatoes, neatly doing the
washing up and carefully separating
their recycling — something you
don't find the travellers doing.

Now a camp is spread on the ground in
Camp Constant activists' white
queue, where they sit on plastic
chairs. Some have children with
them, who are engaged in arts and
crafts activities, while the adults
attend 'workshops' or run the 'café'.
It is very different to the chaos of the
original Dale Farm traveller camp.

These sympathisers make emotive
YouTube clips for YouTube of pretty
young Irish traveller women saying
that the gas has been turned off and

explaining what this will mean for 'the
chilr'n'. Curiously, these video clips
make no mention of the fact that so
many Dale Farm residents built their
homes without planning permission.

Instead, a young man with a
plummy accent and John Lennon
glasses provides a commentary, using
words such as 'atrocious', which
hardly chime with the vocabulary
used by travellers.

One young protester is studying
philosophy at Bristol University. He
told a reporter: 'When the police

her neck. She has been taking part in
protest camps since her mid-teens,
travelling around Europe.

She has attached a warning sign for
the bailiffs which reads: 'Danger of
death. Behind this gate a woman is
attached by her neck. If you attempt
to open this gate you will kill her.'

Another protester has handcuffed
himself to a pole set in concrete. He is
Dean Puckett, 29, and he did a degree in
film production at the Surrey
Institute of Art & Design.

He has made films about living in
the Kew Bridge Eco-Village in
London, and the tented Democracy
Village in Parliament Square. He is
also involved with the anti-fox-hunting
campaign, and supports the
Palestinians' cause.

A 'jobs list' is chalked in cheery
yellow, blue and pink on a blackboard
at the camp. It is comically middle-
class, like a star chart stuck up on a
family fridge to encourage children to
perform their chores.

Tasks include 'litter picking — get
bin bags from kitchen'; 'create areas
for recycling by hut'; and 'clear-up
mugs and plates'.

In one film, the activists are shown
sitting around a campfire listening to
Eastern European gypsies playing the
fiddle. The gypsies have been brought
in to the camp; in this romanticised
clip the Irish travellers are nowhere to be
seen.

In another segment, the activists

It's Glastonbury Festival with a cause attached

come, we won't be moved. We'll fight
to the death for this place.'

He then admitted he had to leave
the camp soon, as 'I need to knuckle
down for my last year of uni'.

A man called Angus is another well-
to-do activist — he was squatting in
an East London house until
discovering Camp Constant.

Emma, 18, is a young French woman
who has chained herself to the camp
gates with a bicycle D-lock around



Pie thrower: Jonathan May-Bowles

light Oriental paper lanterns, and
send them up into the night sky, amid
much cheering.

It is like the Glastonbury Festival,
with a cause attached. But then, this
is the attraction of Camp Constant.

Szarek and Wills no doubt find
themselves at home here — because
although Wills has proclaimed on
television that they have been welcomed
with open arms by the travellers and
are living side-by-side, in fact they
are bedding down alongside other
middle-class activists.

One recent arrival gives an account
of life at Camp Constant on his blog.
Using the name Jonnie Marbles, he
writes: 'The activists are spread
throughout the campsite, but their
main HQ, nicknamed Camp
Constant, has a lovely kitchen and
campfire around which activists and
gypsies gather together to chat, eat
and get a little tipsy in the evening.'

Marbles — real name Jonathan
May-Bowles — has become something
of a celebrity after throwing a foam
pie into media tycoon Rupert
Murdoch's face at a Parliamentary
committee hearing in July.

The 26-year-old, a part-time stand-
up comedian from Windsor, Ber-
kshire, was sentenced to six weeks in
jail for the Murdoch attack.

Now the father-of-one has joined
the travellers to try to prevent their
eviction. May-Bowles, who went to
the prestigious St Bernard's Roman
Catholic Grammar School in Slough,
adds: 'When we arrived, there were
people sorting themselves into
groups and finding roles. My role was
that of a medic.'

Describing the farcical stand-off
with bailiffs last month, he writes: 'We
were expecting the eviction to begin
as early as 8am so the morning was
filled with activity — building
barricades, scouting the perimeter,
playing up to or avoiding cameras.'

Just after lunchtime, a shout went
up that the bailiffs were coming. We
rushed down to the front gate ready

to be evicted. It was a jolly, downing whisky until they
passed out by the campfire.

'Some have given themselves hippy
names, such as Phoenix, and blokes
sport obligatory wispy facial hair and
nose rings.'

'These are bored kids from privileged
backgrounds. There was no socialising
with the travellers — apart from

'They can barely understand the posh accents'

anything else, they could barely understand each other's accents.'

And they are all preparing for a
fight. It has been rumoured that they
are filling plastic bags full of
excrement to use as ammunition to
hurl at the police.

There is an older contingent, too.
Among them is Olivia Boland, a
56-year-old Tory-voting antiques
dealer. Another is Susanna Mitchell-
Cotts, the 66-year-old daughter of a
baronet, who has threatened to chain
herself to the barricades.

She said: 'When I saw what was
happening on TV, I felt so strongly
about it that I had to come down.
We're all anarchists now!'

Then, inevitably, there is Vanessa
Redgrave, the darling of radicals and
lost causes for decades, who is often
on site to speak to television crews.

Her late brother, Corin, suffered a
heart attack in 2005 while pleading
with councillors not to evict the
travellers from Dale Farm. Vanessa, a
veteran of the Trotskyist Workers'
Revolutionary Party, said: 'Forty
travellers came to the Basildon hospital
to pray for him.'

How touching. But like Vanessa, the
Jakes, Olivias, Anguses, Deans and
Emmas will find other causes to latch
on to once the eviction is over —
secure in the knowledge that they
can return to their cosy, gilded life-
style whenever they choose.